

**MARYLAND GOVERNOR’S COMMISSION ON
MIDDLE EASTERN AMERICAN AFFAIRS**

Meeting Minutes

Date: Thursday, August 28, 2008

Time: 6:00 pm – 9:00 pm

Place: Miller Senate Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland

Present: Chair Anwer Hasan, Rudwan Abu-rumman, Bilal Ayyub, Durriya Badani, Riad Dakheel, Dorreya (Didi) Elmenshawy, Miriam Galston, Rafi Rone, Julian H. Spirer, Ibrahim Uyar, Khalil Zaied

Absent: Zahid H. bukhari, Irma Hafeez, Sayed Hassan, Majid R. Mirza, Murat Ozer, Nadia Sawaya, Yonathan (Yoni) Zohar

Staff Present: Iman Awad, Tony Bridges, Angela Lagdameo, David Lee, Agnes M. Smith

Guest Speakers: Wendell Sutton, MBE Advocacy and Outreach
Governor’s Office of Minority Affairs
Barry Bogage, Executive Director
Maryland Israel Development Center (MIDC)

I. Call to Order and Greetings

The meeting was called to order at 6:35 p.m. by Chair Anwer Hasan. Chair Hasan noted that this was the third meeting for the Governor’s Commission on Middle Eastern American Affairs which was appointed by the Governor last October.

II. Introduction of New Commissioners

There were brief introductions from the Commissioners. After brief introductions, Chair Hasan introduced Mr. Izzy Patoka, Executive Director, Governor’s Office of Community Initiatives (GOCI) to talk about the charge of the Commission.

III. Approval of April Meeting Minutes

There was a motion to accept the April 15, 2008 minutes. Minutes passed unanimously.

IV. Review and Approve Minutes from Strategic Planning

There was a motion to accept the June Strategic Planning Session minutes. Minutes passed unanimously.

Chair Hasan spoke about the Chairs of the Sub-groups. The focus for tonight's meeting is business development. The chairs of the committees were selected at the last meeting. Chairs need to meet and show progress in accordance to the work plan that has been put together. Chair Hasan spoke about a challenge he received from the Asian Pacific American Commission after receiving a letter from the Governor in reference the Asian Annual Report. Chair Hasan recognized Senior Executive Director David Lee about the very nice report that he received. Chair Hasan challenged the Middle Eastern American Commission to either match or exceed what the Asian Commission has put together. This is a big task in front of the Commission.

The Chairs for the Sub-Committees is as follows:

Business Development	Anwer Hasan
Workforce Development	Miriam Galston
Community Social Development	Riad Dakheel

Chair Hasan instructed the Commissioners to send e-mails to Special Assistant Iman Awad in reference to what Sub-Committee you would like to be a member of. He would like to keep balance in the Sub-Committees. Each time the Commission has a meeting Chair Hasan expects the Chair of the Sub-Committees to give a report.

V. Business Development

Special Assistant Awad spoke about meeting with the Maryland State Chamber of Commerce which provided a whole lot of information on how to be more involved. Also, the Commission has been trying to develop a business database. She informed the Commission that the Baltimore Jewish Times has already provided a very good list of different services that is offered in the community. Special Assistant Awad spoke about working with Mr. Wendell Sutton and Senior Executive Director Lee on pursuing the minority business aspect and finding out more about the program. They are looking into including the Middle Eastern community for a disparity study.

Chair Hasan asked the Commissioners to help Special Assistant Awad with the database. If you know of the groups and business available, let Special Assistant Awad know so that she can centralize that information. There is also a discussion to form a Middle Eastern Chamber of Commerce. That will be a really good step forward so that the business will have an opportunity to benefit.

Commissioner Dorreya (Didi) Elmenshawy asked what kind of businesses should be included. Chair Hasan informed her that all Middle Eastern owned business should be included. Chair Hasan also told the Commission that the countries have been

defined which is considered Middle Eastern. Chair Hasan told the Commission that the more businesses that can be identified will make a stronger chamber of commerce.

Chair Hasan said that another aspect on business development is to have more Middle Eastern countries included in the Minority Business pool. A letter is being sent to Secretary of Transportation and Special Secretary for Minority Businesses to include more Middle Eastern countries in a survey to have a broader pool.

Chair Hasan informed the Commission that the third thing that is being worked on is the Sister State Program. Chair Hasan has received a letter from the Secretary of State to set-up a meeting to have a Sister State Program put in place. Also, the Lt. Governor is going to Dubai on a cultural visit in early November. We will meet with him and brief him on what the interests are so that when he is up there he can bring some information back on how we can start ~~some~~ relationships.

Commissioner Rudwan Abu-rumman informed the Commissioners that he spoke to someone at Johns Hopkins who said that the Middle Eastern community needs to capitalize in the participation of the gulf countries in expanding Johns Hopkins Hospital University. There is a special building being funded by United Arab Emirates. This fund is way over 100 million dollars. Somehow, somewhere we need to capitalize in it. It will give a better impression about Middle Eastern participation, not just e-mails about oil. These countries are participating in funding for education. Somehow we need to find out how much money is being pumped into Johns Hopkins. As a Commission it is our duty to show the relationship with our countries and Marylanders at large.

Commissioner Elmenshawy asked if it was possible to suggest a place for the Lt. Governor to visit as part of the Dubai trip. Chair Hasan said absolutely and asked Commissioner Elmenshawy to follow up on this matter. Chair Hasan asked Special Assistant Awad to see about maybe setting up a meeting with the Commission and the Lt. Governor before his trip.

Wendell Sutton, Assistant Secretary, Governor's Office of Minority Affairs MBE Advocacy and Outreach

Mr. Sutton said that the Governor's Office of Minority Affairs is the State's chief advocacy and outreach as well as one big compliance office for the Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) program. It is one of the oldest in the country and one of only 4 among the 50 states that have a stature background. Only 16 states in the country still have a MBE program. This year makes 30 years for the MBE program. We work mainly with the minority enterprise program and also with the Small Business Reserve (SBR) program. The SBR program is a program established in the State of Maryland that says 22 to 24 separate agencies must spend 10% of their procurement dollars with small businesses. In the SBR program pool you are competing with businesses of like size. Maryland has over 400,000 small, minority and women owned businesses. There are some measures to determine where you fit in small

business. GOMA has been promoting the SBR program particularly in the immigrant communities and first time business owners. They will try to have a meeting with all the groups that they do business with so that everybody can get a chance to work with each other. Maryland is very fortunate to have such a diversity of business. Mr. Sutton said that he knows there is some question about the minority status for the Middle Eastern groups. This is something that has to be addressed in the disparities study. The disparities study is conducted every 5 years by an outside group to discover or give them a legitimate assessment as to which companies should be in the Minority Business Enterprise program. There are goals in each program. The State's goal on the procurement contracts is 25% of all State contracts to have some sort of minority participation. Mr. Sutton informed the Commission to write a letter to Secretary Porcari about undertaking a disparities study that will include the Middle Eastern community. The study will start in the fall.

VI. Trade Mission to Israel

Barry Bogage, Executive Director, Maryland Israel Development Center (MIDC)

The MIDC was established in 1992 to stimulate the growth of employment opportunities in both economies, which essentially means help create jobs. The way to help create jobs is to bring businesses together that have complimentary activities that can make money together and therefore have to hire more people. It was established after Governor Schaefer signed a Declaration of Cooperation with the Israeli Ambassador in 1988. Officially MIDC is set up as a 501 © (3) non-profit.

Governor Schaefer took the first gubernatorial trade mission to Israel, Egypt and Saudi Arabia in 1989. Every Governor of Maryland has taken the trade mission to Israel. They are the matchmaker between companies in Maryland and Israel. They find out what companies need international markets. They do the research and find companies in Maryland that meets the needs of companies in Israel and vice a versa. They hold a Maryland conference in Israel and hold an Israeli conference in Maryland. The goal is to position MIDC to be the phone call that the Israeli businessman is going to make when a USA office is needed.

MIDC take a delegation to Israel once a year. They hold a one on one meeting with prospects of companies they have been cultivating to come to Maryland. They also visit the existing customers. They also do community relation activities which includes visiting the Sister Cities. Maryland has two Sister Cities in Israel. During the Governor's recent trip to Israel MIDC did 9 business items which include the Governor's City State Program, social services exchanges, arts and cultural group exchanges, youth group exchanges, etc. Also part of the community relations component of the trade mission is to visit historic sites. MIDC acquired two new companies during this trade mission to Israel, BioLineRX and Classifeye Ltd. BioLineRX is a leading startup company in Israel and Classifeye Ltd. uses a technology that will allow you to use the camera on your cell phone to take your fingerprint and authenticate you as the user so that you can do secure transactions

over your cell phone. Also Teva Pharmaceuticals will maintain their trade mission with Maryland.

Commissioner Elmenshawy asked what substantial things the government can offer in order to lure a business to Maryland. Mr. Bogage spoke about the whole range of financial support programs in the Department of Business and Economic Development such as grants, tax abatements, low interest loans, workforce training programs, building off ramps for large campuses, etc. A lot of the companies from Israel are small start up companies.

VII. Business Data

Special Assistant Awad spoke about the website coming soon which will be a useful link to have under resources. She is having a hard time finding Middle Eastern businesses and does not want to put them on the website in case they do not want to be on the list. She will be visiting the local synagogues, mosques, etc. Chair Hasan asked everyone to share with Special Assistant Awad the names of any businesses they know. Commissioner Rudwan Abu-rumman spoke about making a link on the website that businesses can add themselves. Chair Hasan spoke about the short term goals in the Business Development Committee which is to meet with Middle Eastern business associations if any and visit embassy officials. There needs to be a letter to each of the embassies describing what is being done and how they can help. Also contact the local Chamber of Commerce to see if they can define where the businesses are. It was noted that the Arab American Chamber of Commerce and the Turkish American Business Council maybe able to search their business database by states and be able to forward that information to the Commission.

VIII. Review Short Term and Long Term Goals

Chair Hasan spoke about the short and long term goals set up at the last strategic planning meeting. One goal was to set up the database; meet with the Middle Eastern Business Association, State government agencies, embassy officials and local Chamber of Commerce; identify obstacles to Middle Eastern businesses. Chair Hasan believes that the disparity study is one of the areas that will remove that obstacle to provide them an opportunity to become a minority business and take advantage of the program the State has. If there are any other obstacles that you can think, we need to define it so that the Commission can work on eliminating or reducing those obstacles for the Middle Eastern businesses.

The long term goals consisted of the ongoing Middle Eastern American Conference with participation of State agencies, local Chamber of Commerce and embassy officials; Inclusion of Middle Eastern countries to Minority Business Enterprise which is being worked on; Inclusion of Middle Eastern countries in Maryland's Sister State's Program which might happen before the short term goals; Ongoing trade mission to the Middle East which might include partnering with Mr. Bogage or having a separate mission to the Middle East; and accessing feasibility of establishing

a peace zone for business in Maryland. We need to look at the hub zone model in Maryland which may produce some opportunities to the Middle Eastern businesses.

IX. Workforce Development

Commissioner Miriam Galston spoke about attending the Montgomery County Parallel Advisory Committee where they trying to get statics of the number of Middle Eastern Americans and Arab Americans in the nation and Maryland. The Middle Eastern Americans and Arab Americans are underreported.

Commissioner Galston asked for the Commissions help in trying to get a handle on people of the Middle Eastern background incoming with recent immigrants don't always know how to apply and identify jobs in a way where their resumes and skills will be characterized. She welcomes the Commission help in how to try to get at this large group of persons who would benefit and welcome assistance in tapping into the existing job pool. It was noted that it is very difficult culturally for a Middle Easterner to get a job. There needs to be some leaders to help the new comers on how to be patient and fill out applications. Chair Hasan said that the short term goal was to collect data of different types. If you take out the demographics in Maryland workforce and immigration there is non governmental, private, business, etc. Some of this can come from the recent business data created. Public offices where there is a state or city who are those individuals. In order to develop workforce in higher level positions in the administration we need to come up with some sort of mentoring program that can help them in the leadership skills. We also need to understand the governmental hiring policies and making recommendations. If you know how the appointments are made and how people are hired then we can sort of take them and groom them and get them appointed.

X. Community Development

Commissioner Riad Dakheel spoke about the Census not having a identifier for a Middle Easterner. Middle Easterner tends to check off Caucasian because of the definition. It was suggested that someone from the State Planning Commission come and help define this issue since they are planning the Census 2010. Every state has their own census forms.

In reference to the development of the business resource booklet should be a joint effort. This booklet should include education, health, social services, etc. This booklet should provide guidance for the needs of the Middle Eastern community. The Maryland Office for New Americans has a booklet to help assistant new immigrants.

XI. Group Discussion

Chair Hasan suggested that sub-committees meet between bi-monthly meetings. Also, a Commissioner may be a part of any sub-committee that he/she chooses. However, Chair Hasan would like to keep each sub-committees balanced.

Commissioner Julian Spirer spoke about Maryland not having a community health center for the Middle Eastern community. He represents a group of Arab Americans who is interested in setting up a community health center. This maybe a project that the Commission can take the lead, facilitate and get all the help needed.

Commissioner Abu-rumman spoke about the Maryland Muslim Center in Springfield received \$150,000 from the State of Maryland for assistance to their health center.

Chair Hasan spoke about regrouping the long and short term goals and have some sort of organized approach. Chair Hasan also informed the Commission that any project that one might want to take the lead on must be worked out with the sub-committee chair.

Commissioner Rone spoke about the different projects the Commission already have pursued such as minority business, trade mission, health clinic, community resources. A table needs to be set up with the first column being project, second column individuals who would volunteer to work on that project and the third column would be to identify resources that can support that project. Chair Hasan said that we need to have a lead for each project. Identify the projects for each sub-committee, individuals can pick specific projects and communicate with the chair of each sub-committee.

Senior Executive Director David Lee said that when the Commission went through the strategic planning the committees were formed to mirror the Executive Order from the Governor with priorities that he set forth. As a Commission it is important to prioritize certain things. Try to prioritize the things that are important to your community and to the Governor. You have a very ambitious work plan and agenda here. Each committee should be working on one or two things. You can work on maybe one short term and one long term goal. There needs to be some sort of reporting structure.

XII. Public Participation

Mr. Ahmed Awad told the Commission that without the database, the Commission will not be able to serve the community they are trying to reach. Two things that we are dealing with in the Middle Eastern community: The Jewish community has been extremely successful in organizing itself. The Arab population that came to Maryland is very suspicious in government. The minute you say I'm from the government and I'm here to help you, you lose them. How can you reach that community? It's going to be a slow process and a huge task. Until we reach a number of inputs in the database, the questions we ask the community should not be

gruesome. He spoke about the opportunity coming up in the next two months, the fasting month of Ramadan. Generally speaking, a lot of the communities get together and that's when we should approach them. Someone has to go there and say, I'm here, here's what we are offering and we need your help and support. Basis communication will get you the starting point in the database.

Chair Hasan asked that at the next meeting we have someone from the Department of Planning and we can see how we can help work on the Census. It was also suggested that the Census forms be obtained before the next meeting.

Senior Executive Director Lee let the Commission know that they do not have to do this on their own. A lot of the issues talked about here touch the Hispanic and Asian community. Encourage you to think about working with the other Commissions as well. Today they had a meeting about having a joint chairs meeting very soon to bring together an initial meeting to talk about some of the common issues. Later on towards the end of the year, have a joint event with all the Commissions. This will be a great opportunity to network and see what the other Commissions are doing.

Chief of Staff Tony Bridges informed the Commission that the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives staffs all of the Commissions. Special Assistant Awad has the tools and support from GOCL. He is very encouraged about what he heard in the Commission meeting. He told them that whatever recommendations that they presented to the Governor, he was sure that whatever talent and resources the office has, that the plans will not just sit on the shelf. He told them not to just think of resources within their communities, but you also have the talent of the Governor's Office and the resources of the coordinating office to work with the different agencies in State government to get the resources that you need to make sure that the plans and ideas that you come up with are implemented. It is not all on Special Assistant Awad, but it is on the entire office.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:50 p.m.